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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the history of school governance in the U.S. It discusses four major shifts in education governance that have occurred over the past 150 years, describing how control was firmly anchored in local communities throughout most of the 19th century. By the end of the century, Americans decided that schooling should serve public needs as well as provide private benefits. Local control of education was considered too idiosyncratic, diverse, and unpredictable in its outcome. Urbanization and industrialization of the country resulted in the industrialization of education. Another transformation occurred in the 1950s when social movements led to an education-reform agenda established to enact massive institutional change. Education was then considered a private good, protected by constitutional entitlement. This view was eventually challenged in the 1980s, a period when schools were considered to be in crisis. Educators shed the concept of education for civic virtue and emphasized economic growth, productivity, and efficiency. The article examines anomalies in U.S. education, such as the fact that, although Americans developed the most decentralized system of school governance in the world, American schools are more alike than different. (Contains 47 references.) (RJM)

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THE INVISIBLE HAND OF IDEOLOGY

Perspectives from the History of School Governance

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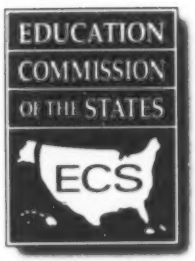

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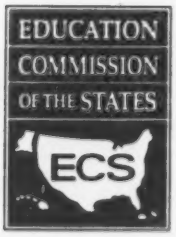

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Americans grow dissatisfied with public schools, they often blame the way they are governed. Current policy talk about restructuring, choice and accountability for reaching standards is a recent episode in a long tradition of governance reforms going back a century and a half. Governance reforms occupy a special place in the spectrum of planned changes in education, for governance is intimately involved with the *how and why* as well as the *what* of public schooling.

Reformers tend to ignore or dismiss the history of governance, perhaps assuming that amnesia is a virtue when the past is a prologue to current problems. While history does not offer ready-made solutions to current governance issues, it can illuminate the complexity of choices and enrich deliberation about them.

Four major shifts in education governance have occurred over the past 150 years. Throughout most of the 19th century, control was firmly anchored in local communities and formal governmental authority was nonexistent. Nonetheless, an ideology of republicanism and civic virtue provided the underpinnings for a common value system which served as the rationale for a system of free public education.

The fact that governmental authority was virtually nonexistent does not mean government played no role. Indeed, both federal and state governments actively endorsed and created incentives for the development of public education. Government, however, provided only the legal foundation. It was left to others — ministers and educators — to build on that foundation and determine the substance of public education.

The crusaders who spread public education generally shared the following set of beliefs:

- The purpose of public education was to train upright citizens by inculcating a common denominator of nonsectarian morality and nonpartisan civic instruction.

- The common school should be free, open to all children and public in support and control.

By the end of the century, citizens generally seemed to agree that schooling not only provided private benefits but also fulfilled public purposes.

In 19th century America — a mostly rural nation — local lay trustees vastly outnumbered teachers and had powers unmatched in any system of public education in the world. Even in cities, large lay boards actively participated in all phases of decisionmaking and delegated many powers to decentralized ward school committees. State education departments were tiny and had meager means of enforcing regulations, and the federal office of education had minimal powers and staff. Local lay control seemed to be the paradigm of republican education.

With urbanization and rapid industrialization, however, the existing system of education was deemed by many reform-minded educators to be too idiosyncratic, diverse and unpredictable in its outcome. Much of urban growth, moreover, was fueled by immigrants, who needed to be "Americanized." But, as America was becoming more urban, it also was going through a major industrial transformation. At the heart of that transformation was a belief in science and expert management based on rationality.

Under the leadership of the administrative progressives, schools became part of the machinery of industrial efficiency. School management could be rationalized along efficient, corporate models, and schools themselves could be harnessed to produce the kinds of workers and citizens the new industrial order required. Schooling was seen as too important for the future of the nation to leave to laypersons.

At the turn of the 20th century, reformers began to focus on depoliticizing and differentiating schooling. Lay governance, they said, was chaotic, intrusive and often corrupt. Reformers considered the uniform curriculum of the 19th century school to be rigid, bookish and ill-adapted to the variety of pupils flooding the nation's classrooms. They turned to business for inspiration and support, and businesspeople proved to be useful allies. Education leaders and their business partners believed progress was possible because science had given the "experts" — psychologists, superintendents, curriculum designers and managers — the necessary tools to plan the course of economic and social evolution.

A third ideological transformation occurred when the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* decision mobilized new social movements that laid the groundwork for an education reform agenda whose goal was massive institutional change. In doing so, the decision shifted education policy in an entirely new direction. With that shift came a redefinition of education as a private good, protected by constitutional entitlement. National interest was defined as the aggregation of private interests. By providing children with the education that was rightfully "due" them, society would be better off.

As programs designed to address the multiplicity of problems proliferated, education governance became a more haphazard, amorphous enterprise. Critics of the existing education system argued that existing institutional arrangements or configurations of control were both the objects of and obstacles to change. Groups of outsiders, those who previously had been denied power, sought their fair share and fought for their civil rights. Congress, federal bureaucracies, the courts and newly formed education interest groups were just some of the forces redefining the education policy agenda and reshaping the landscape. The policy ideal of total justice and the bureaucratic and legal structures that grew up in its support did much to institutionalize conflict in schools.

The mid-1980s marked another major turning point in American education policy. The ideology underpinning this shift asserted that the U.S. education system was undermining the nation's international competitive capacity. The new ideology's manifesto was *A Nation at Risk*, which predicted in hyperbolic terms the demise of the United States as an international industrial leader if it did not improve its public education system.

With this view has come a noticeable shift in public sensibility regarding the social purposes of education. The idea of education as "moral development" has departed from most public discourse about education. The concept of education for civic virtue, the overriding concern of the common school movement in the 19th century, seems to many a quaint echo from an irrelevant past. The dominant rhetoric of schooling today is about economic growth, productivity and efficiency.

The politics of the 1990s can be regarded in many respects as an attempt to undo the institutional structures created by the politics of the 1960s. It is unsurprising then that a dominant theme in education policy today is that of privatization and the creation of market mechanisms to regulate education practice in lieu of state control and regulation. An emerging policy strategy for school reform is the creation of quasi-markets as a means of stimulating change.

The issue of who controls education is being recast in different terms. Choice is a movement away from government and various institutionally mobilized interests and is being proffered as an antidote to a politics of education that serves narrow special interests. It is the "anti-politics" of markets.

Currently, there is no evidence of a national consensus regarding the institutional framework in which public schooling operates or the larger social and cultural purposes a system of public schools ought to serve. The real questions for the future of education governance then are: What interests should education serve? What is "public" in public education other than its funding? If education does not serve a community of interests beyond the economic interests of the individual, is the common good defined as the aggregation of individual interests?

INTRODUCTION

When Americans grow dissatisfied with public schools, they often blame the way they are governed. Critics insist there is too much democracy or too little, too much centralization or too little, too many actors in policy formation or too few. Although Americans repeatedly have demonstrated a profound distrust of government, education reformers have shared a utopian faith that once Americans found the right pattern of school governance, education would thrive. Current policy talk about restructuring, choice and accountability for reaching standards is a recent episode in a long tradition of governance reforms going back a century and a half.

Governance reforms occupy a special place in the spectrum of planned changes in education, for governance is intimately involved with the *how and why* as well as the *what* of public schooling. Some reformers might say: "Representative democracy. Who needs it? What we need is better test scores." But if public schools are to continue to perform their major historical function — preserving and advancing democracy — they need democratic governance.

It is not just the young who need to learn democratic ideas and practices as part of their political education. Adults also need to practice and exemplify a democratic process of decisionmaking. In recent years in education, Americans hardly have modeled how a civic society should work. The politics of education has become fragmented and severed from much of its legacy. The traditional agents of representative government in education — local school boards and state departments of education — often have been derided or bypassed by critics, some of whom propose abolishing local boards or state education departments.

Reformers tend to ignore or dismiss the history of governance, perhaps assuming amnesia is a virtue when the past is a prologue to current problems. Is such amnesia desirable? While history does not offer ready-made solutions to current governance issues, it can illuminate the complexity of choices and enrich deliberation about them.

The history of governance of public schooling is full of surprises and anomalies that encourage viewing familiar subjects in fresh ways. Here are a few of the puzzles discussed in this paper:

- Ever since the Revolution, Americans have distrusted government, but they created the most comprehensive and inclusive system of public schools in the world.

- Americans developed the most decentralized system of school governance in the world, but public schools across the country are more alike than different.

- The leading state superintendents of the 19th century had nowhere near the formal powers of superintendents today, but they had great influence in shaping both educational ideas and institutions.

- The governance of 19th century urban schools often was chaotic, but classroom teaching was relentlessly lockstep. By contrast, in the rationally organized bureaucracies of the 20th century, the meticulous plans of the central office often were disconnected from actual instruction.

Part of the clue to these puzzles, and others examined, is the power of ideas in shaping institutions. This power might be called the "invisible hand of ideology." Shared belief systems do matter. They build common cultural meanings that in turn shape schools and form public expectations about them. The history of governance in public education is not only about formal structures, organizational charts and interest-group politics; it is also the story of the political goals of republican education and attempts to translate those aims into practice in a highly diverse society.

EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

A republican political ideology and a commitment to local control of schools help to account for the invention and rapid spread of one of the most successful reforms of the 19th century — public education. The founding fathers agreed the republic could not last unless citizens were properly educated. Thomas Jefferson, for example, argued eloquently for locally controlled public schools whose central purpose was political socialization.

Education became a favored way of protecting citizens from the government and the government from citizens. Americans wanted to keep public schools under the eye and thumb of locally elected officials, thereby overcoming their distrust of distant government. It is arguable that without local control, Americans would not have chosen *public* schools. In a rural nation of dispersed families, it also made economic sense to have one school in the neighborhood, a *common school* as it was called, that would enroll Baptists and Lutherans, girls and boys and prosperous and impoverished children.

At the beginning of the 19th century, American schools were an institutional hodgepodge, a miscellaneous collection of sectarian schools, elite academies, charity schools for the poor and schools for ethnic enclaves. Joining these were pioneer public schools, which were supported by local property taxation (and sometimes state school funds), supervised by locally elected trustees, free and open to all children (at least in theory; blacks, Indians and Asians often were unwelcome). By the end of the century, public schools enrolled about nine in 10 students, and the lines between private and public had become more sharply drawn.

The Triumph of Local Control

The actual everyday governance of public schools in the 19th century was a grassroots affair conducted by locally elected trustees. In 1860, four out of five Americans lived in rural areas. Dotting the 19th century countryside were the one-room public schools that were the sole form of schooling for most children. Small and sparsely equipped, but often with a bell tower resembling a church steeple, the school was linked closely to two other local institutions — the family and the church. Local trustees and parents selected the teachers, supervised their work and sometimes boarded them in their homes. Brothers, sisters and cousins went to school together, and, with their classmates, gave "exhibitions" of their knowledge to community members at public assemblies.

The school, like the church, was expected to be a "museum of virtue," wrote W. Waller in his 1932 *Sociology of Teaching*. Ministers persuaded local citizens to build common schools and often held church services in school buildings. Although officially nonsectarian in religion and nonpartisan in politics, the school was expected to be religious and moral in tone and republican in doctrine. No one better represented the common denominator of republican virtue than the Reverend William Holmes McGuffey, whose textbooks were read by generations of schoolchildren.

Of course, there were some differences between schools, mostly according to community wealth, ethnicity and region (e.g., the South was late in adopting the common school and had an impoverished and racially segregated system). As settlers moved across the continent, however, they built schools that were remarkably similar in institutional character and that taught similar lessons.

How can one explain these similarities in the absence of centralized formal control? Partly, new communities simply copied institutions in the older communities they came from. But there was a less obvious and deeper source of standardization as well — a common Protestant-republican ideology, adapted to the common school crusade in the 1840s by state superintendents such as Horace Mann and in later decades by other leaders. A common set of political and educational principles was a source of standardization. The crusaders who spread public education generally shared the following beliefs:

- The purpose of public education was to train upright citizens by inculcating a common denominator of nonsectarian morality and nonpartisan civic instruction.

- The common school should be free, open to all children and public in support and control.

By the end of the century, citizens generally seemed to agree schooling not only provided private benefits but also fulfilled public purposes.

The most influential education leaders of the 19th century included state superintendents such as Mann, Henry Barnard, John Swett and Calvin Wiley. These men had minimal formal powers of office and little or no staff. They collected statistics and tried to disseminate promising education practices. For the most part, they could only persuade but not compel. Having survived one attempt to eliminate his position as Massachusetts education secretary, Mann realized the political clout of local school boards. He declared local school trustees to be "more worthy than any other class of men, to be considered as the pilots, who are directing the course of the bark that contains all the precious interests of mankind, and steering it either for its rescue or its ruin."

Few key state leaders worked for a lifetime as educators. Yet their careers, and those of dozens like them, illustrated the power of ideas to change minds and build institutions. In their speeches and publications, they reminded fellow citizens of their obligations, chided them for backsliding and inspired them with images of a "millennial future."

Some people dissented, of course, from the sort of public culture desired by the majority of school reformers. The attempts of nativist and Protestant education leaders to incorporate their ideology into the schools produced conflict as well as consensus. For instance, some Catholics protested use of the King James Bible, and immigrant groups wanted their languages and cultures included and honored in the schools. Just what was to be a common public culture sometimes was contested in communities. More often, however, citizens agreed with Mann's model of moral and civic instruction.

What Roles for Federal and State Governments?

Legally, the local common school was part of a state system. Some states were more aggressive than others in trying to impose state standards on local districts, but few had the power or staff to coerce local trustees during the 19th century. As late as 1890, the average size of a state education department was two persons, including the superintendent. This was no accident, for most citizens did not want active state government, wrote J. Bryce in *The American Commonwealth* in 1888.

When citizens of states and territories wrote or revised their state constitutions, they consistently showed their disdain for strong government by hamstringing their legislatures and weakening the executive branch. They limited the time state lawmakers could meet, the topics they could address and the money they were paid. In 1879, a delegate to the convention to revise the California constitution proposed the following resolution:

> "There shall be no legislature convened from and after the adoption of this constitution. . . and any person who shall be guilty of suggesting that a legislature shall be held, shall be punished as a felon without benefit of clergy" (N. Sargent, *California Law Review*, 1917).

The federal constitution did not mention education. Attempts to create an activist role for the federal government generally failed throughout the 19th century. The U.S. Office of Education, not founded until 1867, had puny financing, few duties and a small staff.

But there were two ways in which Congress acted to promote public education. First, it distributed land endowments to local districts (Congress had lots of land but not much money). More than 77 million acres, carved out of the public domain, was designated to support public schools in the new states — three times more land than land-grant universities and other public institutions received in the 19th century. Even Southern leaders fearful of central government took the public school handouts. The federal government was good at distributing benefits, if less than successful in regulating how they were employed.

Second, Congress approved the admission of new states to the union, a task that indirectly involved the federal government in education. Although it is easy to take this massive task for granted in a time when it takes five hours to jet from coast to coast, creating one republican nation from dozens of republics formed out of the wilderness was a daunting challenge. The U.S. Constitution, building on ordinances of the 1780s, required new states to have "a republican form of government." Embedded in the concept of republic was a commitment to education that became more explicit as time went on.

After the Civil War, Congress demanded that all new states admitted to the union provide free, nonsectarian and public schools. As Congress created a nation of new republics across the continent, leaders considered the land-grant public school essential in preserving the republican form of government.

As evidence, when six new states joined the union in 1889, they promised in their constitutions to provide schools that were free, nonsectarian and public schools. One of these states, North Dakota, expressed a common faith when it declared "a high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people [is] necessary in order to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and happiness of the people." The corollary was free and universal education. Another new state of 1889, Washington, said it was the "paramount duty of the state" to educate all children.

In 19th century America — a mostly rural nation — local lay trustees vastly outnumbered teachers and had powers unmatched in any system of public education in the world. Even in cities, large lay boards actively participated in all phases of decisionmaking and delegated many powers to decentralized ward school committees. State education departments were tiny and had meager means of enforcing regulations, and the federal office of education had minimal powers and staff. Local lay control seemed to be the paradigm of republican education.

GOVERNANCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Was local control of education a guarantee of responsive democracy or a drag on modern schooling? Many forms of local governance have diminished in the steady march from decentralization to centralization. Hundreds of thousands of school districts were collapsed to about 16,000, and one-room schools nearly disappeared. City school systems became large, differentiated bureaucracies in which small lay boards delegated most decisions to administrators.

State departments of education and, more recently, courts and the federal government, assumed an increasingly activist role in setting policies and checking compliance with regulations. Centralized forms of "apolitical" administrative control in the Progressive Era promised efficient coordination of school systems and accountability. A century ago, many educators saw the leading urban school districts as models for the reform of the rest of public education.

Observers with different viewpoints disagree about how to evaluate these changes. Some portray the era of local control as a golden age of democratic participation. When schools were decentralized in rural America, they argue, parents and patrons shaped schools to suit their particular needs and tastes. Teachers were part of the community and met its needs. Bureaucracy and regulations were unnecessary. Schooling was cheap, effective and responsive to parental concerns about morality and useful learning. From their perspective, local people were right to resist consolidation and state regulation, for they already had schools that served them well.

Others tell a different story. According to this version, local control resulted in schools that were grossly unequal in resources, reproduced the "dull parochialism and attenuated totalitarianism" of village life, repressed the discretion and expertise of professional educators, and stirred petty politics. The cure was to consolidate country districts and remove city schools from ward politics, noted E.P. Cubberley in 1914.

In urging centralization of control, education reformers of the Progressive Era argued that concentrating authority in experts would bring a kind of accountability absent in a more fragmented and dispersed system. Regulation, bureaucratization and centralization would equalize education by standardizing it, delegate decisionmaking to experts and "Americanize" a diverse population, they said.

In recent years, critics have argued that Progressive Era reforms produced bureaucratic arteriosclerosis, schools insulated from parents and patrons, and the low productivity of a declining industry protected as a quasi-monopoly. Some call for decentralized decisionmaking coupled with accountability for "high performance." Others argue the whole system of political and bureaucratic control is so ineffective that there should be an open market of schooling in which competition would guarantee results.

Corporate Model of Governance of City Schools

The relationship between urban school governance and education practice was complex in the late 19th century. The public made decisions about schooling through multiple agencies, such as city councils, school boards, ward school committees and boards of public works. The external governance of school systems was so complicated that it resembled one of Rube Goldberg's creative machines.

Even amid so many different bosses, the superintendents of the time generally succeeded in creating pedagogical machines of relentless accountability. They divided pupils into grades, installed a curricular ladder, calibrated teaching to that system, supervised staff to make sure they were toeing the line and tested students on the content of the required curriculum. The United States probably will never again have such a tightly coupled and "systemic" form of instruction. In essence, strict control of classroom teaching and student progress coexisted with non-systems of "governance" that seemed a nightmare to reformers of the time, wrote J.D. Philbrick in 1885.

At the turn of the 20th century, reformers attacked these two features of urban school systems — their crazy-quilt governance and their lockstep instruction. They wanted to depoliticize and differentiate schooling. Lay governance, they said, was chaotic, intrusive and often corrupt. Reformers considered the uniform curriculum of the 19th century school to be rigid, bookish and ill-adapted to the variety of pupils flooding the nation's classrooms. They turned to business for inspiration and support, and businesspeople proved to be useful allies. Education leaders and their business partners believed progress was possible because science had given the "experts" — psychologists, superintendents, curriculum designers and managers — the necessary tools to plan the course of economic and social evolution.

By emulating patterns of corporate organizational control, school leaders thought they could remove schools from politics. From 1890 to 1920, city after city abolished decentralized ward boards, and the average number of central board members in cities of more than 100,000 dropped from 21 to seven. According to the new ideal of corporate management, these smaller boards were to decide "policy" and delegate "administration" to the superintendent and specialists, and not busy themselves with details of running the system as in the 19th century. As new state charters altered the form of governance of city schools, school boards increasingly were composed of business and professional elites elected at large rather than by districts. All this, of course, did not mean that schools were "taken out of politics," but simply that political structures and participants changed.

By copying the internal functional specialization and coordination of centralized firms, early 20th century reformers believed they could make school systems efficient, differentiated by function and accountable. In Delaware, for example, Pierre S. DuPont sought to apply to schools the principles he had used in consolidating and reorganizing giant corporations such as General Motors and the DuPont Company. Convinced the state needed to improve its schools if it was to hold its own in economic competition with other states, he formed and subsidized an elite organization called "Service Citizens of Delaware" (which was much like today's business

roundtables). DuPont and this group promoted studies, experiments and media and legislative campaigns to modernize public education.

If there was one best way — and these reformers believed there was — then centralized authority and expert administration were necessary for its implementation. Decentralization of control was anachronistic, a drag on progress. Because large, comprehensive school districts benefited from economies of scale, they could provide differentiated curricula unavailable in small school districts to meet a variety of student needs. Centralization, they believed, promised more choices as well as greater efficiency.

In the process, reformers sought to define a standard school system. A school was standard when it conformed to a professional model often written into law and engraved on the public mind as essential to the institution. A teacher, for example, was a person certified to instruct at a particular level or in a particular subject. A high school was a separate building where teenaged students could take a variety of different subjects ranging from the academic to the vocational.

The corporate model of governance persisted. It became so durable a feature of American public education that political scientists of the 1950s sometimes referred to urban districts as "closed systems." City schools became templates of reform copied by smaller communities across the nation.

Consolidation of State Administrative Authority

In this process of standardization, state governments played a prominent role by legislating and regulating what a modern school district should be. In the first half of the 20th century, self-confident professional educators believed they knew what was wrong with the public schools, what changes were needed and how they could make these blueprints of progress in education a reality. Scorecard in hand, education experts evaluated individual schools on how well they matched the new model. Professional teams surveyed districts and whole states according to a template of approved practice. Experts told elected officials what they needed to do to bring schools up to modern state standards.

The key members of the coalition that pushed administrative progressive reforms at the state level were education professionals, such as leading city and state superintendents, university professors and activists in state affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA). Joining them, and sometimes taking the lead, were other groups with resources and access to power and publicity, such as the Russell Sage Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller General Education Board and the U.S. Office of Education.

Of course, it was not only the professional reformers who wanted new laws and affirmation of their values. A variety of lay interest groups also sought to influence the curriculum. Business lobbies such as the National Association of Manufacturers pressed for vocational training. The American Legion lobbied for its version of American history, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union pushed for courses on the evils of alcohol. Educators often portrayed such groups as outsiders meddling in professional matters.

Generally, though, the most effective state-level education lobbies were the NEA affiliates. As lobbyists, educators reminded themselves they should be cloaked in expertise and nonpartisan benevolence, just like Horace Mann. A NEA advisor on state legislation cautioned school people not to make unseemly alliances or to cut bargains: "'Be sure you are right, then go ahead' is a good motto for a program of school legislation."

These reformers, working closely with allies in state education departments, used a variety of strategies to persuade the public of the need for change and legislators of the desirability of new laws. One of the most effective strategies was the school survey, a form of applied "science" designed to pinpoint problems and advocate remedies. Between 1905 and 1910, there was an epidemic of 28 state education commissions appointed to survey the schools. Professors, knowing the American penchant for batting averages and comparisons, devised scales for comparing states, districts and individual schools. One foundation researcher created an index of efficiency that ranked all 48 state school systems in 1912.

Private organizations not directly responsible to the public also played a prominent part in reorganizing the education system. Accrediting agencies gave the stamp of approval to schools that were up to date. Some private companies created tests of "intelligence" and "achievement," while others cobbled together student textbooks. Foundations subsidized surveys and financed pilot projects. Private professional groups such as the NEA spread the latest professional wisdom. They were agents of private, not public, government. Everyday decisionmaking in education remained officially with the public, which elected officials at the state and local levels. Informally, though, reformers determined much policy within their new, and buffered, hierarchies.

Reformers did not always speak with one voice, however. Teachers and administrators, for example, sometimes clashed on tenure. On occasion, rural and urban teacher groups disagreed on state finance formulas. Elementary and secondary teachers might debate the virtue of a single salary scale. By and large, though, education leaders in school districts shared common agendas and worked closely with colleagues in state departments of education and universities. The price of consensus was an implied agreement that state departments of education would not threaten the authority of local administrators and, in turn, school administrators would support the state's education bureaucracy. This was not a pluralist and grassroots system of governance of the sort common in the 19th century.

Rather, state departments of education, for the most part, were agents of professional hierarchies composed of various education interests. There is no evidence of independent state bureaucracies competing for policy or administrative dominance with other education interests. State bureaucracy was the means to integrate elite aspirations for public education into an organizational scheme of schooling. Conspicuously absent from this arrangement was any pluralistic competition in the process of education decisionmaking.

In California, for instance, the state board of education was also the governing board of the state teachers colleges, selecting their presidents and approving faculty appointments. The executive director of the California Teachers Association, the deans of the schools of education at Stanford

University, the University of Southern California and the University of California at Berkeley formed the hub of education policymaking.

Reformers sought to consolidate rural districts, abolish ward committees in cities, give new legal standing and certification to new professional specialties such as counseling or special education, set standards for buildings and sanitation, mandate new subjects and reduce disparities of school finance. Because educators helped design and promote such laws, they were more likely to enforce them in their own districts. In the attempt to bring all schools up to a state-approved level, no detail was too small to evade attention. For example, two professors from Teachers College, Columbia University, created score cards for country schools that rated them on their window shades, sanitary drinking cups and toilets.

Reformers and their allies in state education departments did not want simply to amass a pile of new laws. They wanted school codes that expressed a systematic and enforceable approach to education. As the functions of state departments expanded, so did their bureaucracies. Between 1900 and 1930, state education department staffs grew more than tenfold, from 177 to 1,800.

The main role of state education departments in the first half of this century was to legitimate and administer the agenda of Progressive reformers. To their credit, they were quite successful in building new consolidated systems. Their hope, however, that they could take schools out of politics proved to be misguided, as their successors became well aware.

Postwar Pressures

During the period from about 1900 to the 1950s, the public was willing to cede control over education decisionmaking to education experts. A series of events, however, made it evident to the public that elite educational professionals could not deliver what they had promised, and an increasingly wary public began to question the legitimacy of existing configurations of control.

The end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War initiated a new education agenda based on America's success in the former war and the need to win the new one. Many people believed American superiority in science and technology had won World War II for the United States. Leading scientists and foundation directors — notably at the newly created National Science Foundation — thought the quality of mathematics and science education in America's public schools, however, was inadequate to meet the nation's premier policy objective — the containment of Communism.

The Cold War agenda emerged from discontent among intellectuals as well. Arthur Bestor, Richard Hofstadter and James Conant, for instance, leveled their criticisms directly at the wall of professionalism erected by the administrative progressives. They argued that elite educators used professionalism to contain education decisionmaking within their own tight circles. The elite educators' strategy draped politics in the rhetoric of professionalism, equating professional control with the common good; at the same time, they condemned political control as captive of special interests, and thus parochial and lacking expertise.

National hand-wringing over education soon turned into finger pointing, however, with the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in 1957. The Russians not only had succeeded in developing a nuclear arms capacity, but also appeared to have taken the lead in the race to conquer outer space. Critics blamed a legacy of progressive education as the culprit responsible for America's scientific decline.

Although state education departments received significant amounts of funding as a way of encouraging them to provide technical assistance to districts, the money did little to alter state-local institutional relationships. Authority and control over curriculum remained firmly entrenched with local districts. While reformers did talk about the need to strengthen state leadership and capacity, they assumed problems of student achievement could be fixed through increased financial support and the reallocation of organizational resources at the state level.

Indeed, policymakers were careful to step gingerly around issues of local control. They hoped to achieve large-scale reform in mathematics, science and foreign language instruction without disrupting prevailing patterns of control. Ultimately, policymakers prided themselves on how little their reform efforts interfered with local decisionmaking and how little it altered the balance of power among the political forces that shaped education governance.

The Institutionalization of Conflict

In spite of public criticism of the education establishment, the pervasive ideology of expertise and advocacy of professional control remained intact; that is, until a new crisis signaled a major shift in American political ideology and a new education policy agenda. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* decision mobilized new social movements that laid the groundwork for an education reform agenda whose goal was massive institutional change. In doing so, the decision shifted education policy in an entirely new direction. New interests outside the education establishment came to life in the social ferment of the 1960s and mobilized a new politics of education that placed new demands on the system.

Critics of the existing education system argued that existing institutional arrangements or configurations of control were both the objects of and obstacles to change. Groups of outsiders, those who previously had been denied power, sought their fair share and fought for their civil rights. Members of social movements pressed for social and civic justice, anchored in an ideology of individual rights and the affirmative responsibility of government to articulate, elaborate, protect and enforce those rights. Congress, federal bureaucracies, the courts and newly formed education interest groups were just some of the forces redefining the education policy agenda and reshaping the landscape.

The professional consensus that guided education decisionmaking in the first half of the century collapsed not only under external pressures of new forces for change but also under the internal pressures of professional conflict. Elite hierarchies fractured as administrators and teachers competed for control. New policy arenas were formed as state legislatures divided in support of special interests. Some members supported the interests of teachers, others the interests of administrators, yet others the interests of local trustees. The edifice of professional unity crumbled even more as groups coalesced around specific policy interests. Education for handicapped and

learning-disabled children, bilingual and compensatory education, the education of gifted children and a host of other interests developed their own constituencies and legislative advocates.

The new agenda was mirrored in state agencies as well, especially as the agencies' relationship to schools took a sharp turn from past practice. The consensual politics of the past 50 years was replaced quickly by more contentious, institutionally balkanized politics. The relationships between schools and state agencies often became adversarial as state agencies became enforcers for a proliferation of education interests. Instead of serving as an umbrella for organized interests within the state, as they had done in the past, state agencies became aligned with various policy interests: school desegregation, the education of handicapped children, compensatory education, migrant education and a variety of new programs intended to increase education opportunity.

New organizational structures reflected this change as state agencies turned to policy rather than subject matter or disciplinary concerns. In most state education departments, the number of special education specialists soon eclipsed the number of mathematics, science or reading specialists.

As the federal interest in education grew, so did federally funded programs and the bureaucracies to oversee them. State education departments became virtual holding companies for a collection of federal and, later, state categorically funded programs. The reshaping of state education agencies accelerated as federal subsidies to them increased, and they assumed the role of federal outposts overseeing the expansion of federal policy interest in education. Administrative budgets for all state education agencies increased by 114% between 1965 and 1970, a jump from $139 million to $298 million. Nearly 60% of this budget growth was attributable to federal funding. For the same period, total state agency staff doubled, with approximately 22,000 employees working for state departments by 1970.

Just as the redirection of education policy, the redistribution of power among education interests and the realignment of political forces changed the relationship among education professionals, they also changed the relationship between state agencies and schools. Intergovernmental relations became increasingly adversarial as state agencies became enforcers of proliferating interests. The dissolution of professional consensus turned education into a highly contested territory. District administrators in charge of bilingual education or the education of handicapped students often had stronger ties to state and federal policymakers and bureaucrats than to their local boards. Federal and state policy interests often conflicted with local policy interests. In an effort to secure compliance, state and federal policymakers stretched an ever-tightening regulatory net over schools, and state education departments became the enforcers.

With the emergence of highly differentiated policy sectors, education governance became increasingly complex as institutional coherence gave way to programmatic fragmentation. The effect of these changes was a substantial alteration in the governance structure of schools. The policy ideal of total justice and the bureaucratic and legal structures that grew up in its support did much to institutionalize conflict in schools. School advisory committees that came with categorically funded programs often undermined the authority of local boards. California's School Improvement Program, for example, was crafted as an end-run around local authority. Collective

bargaining flourished to redress the perceived imbalance of power between teachers and school boards.

In the first half of the century, institutionalization was the solution; in the second half, it became the problem. As an ever-growing number of social policy issues gained legitimacy and worked their way, largely through the courts, onto national political agendas, they no longer could be ignored. Equally importantly, they could not be accommodated under existing institutional arrangements. While this shift in public policy was both necessary and legitimate, it initiated major changes — often highly disruptive — in school governance and the state role as well.

The trajectory of education governance since the 1960s conventionally has been regarded as a movement toward increasing centralization at the expense of local control. Analysts point to the increasing number of regulations dealing with everything from student disciplinary matters to extracurricular activities, as well as to the increasing numbers of people who have a say in how schools should be run, how students should be treated and under what conditions teachers should teach. In reality, that reputed centralization is partial and applies only to some programs and areas of schooling. While laws may specify in minute detail some aspects of schooling — education services for handicapped and learning-disabled students, for instance — other areas remain untouched. California law, for example, goes to great lengths to specify the content of sex education classes and courses for pregnant minors. On the other hand, it is parsimonious in examining the content of science and mathematics curricula.

While broad access to policy decisionmaking has decreased in favor of mobilized special interests, it is inaccurate to attribute this reduction solely to centralization. The present system of governance might be characterized more accurately as control over discrete policy sectors. Specific policy areas are controlled by those most affected. Teacher unions control issues related to the teaching profession. Special education is controlled by yet another interest group, and programs for gifted and talented students by yet another.

Indeed, over the past 30 years, education has become a vastly complex enterprise, shaped by many forces, such as state legislatures, governors, chief state school officers, multiple levels of bureaucracy, various levels of government, the courts, public- and private-interest groups, textbook publishers, testing services, foundations, think tanks, colleges and universities. And, as was noted earlier, activity at one level of government does not diminish activity at another.

The development of state-level curriculum frameworks and standards does not preclude districts from developing their own, which may or may not be compatible with state efforts. Even within districts, there may be considerable dispersal of authority among schools and departments. Within this fragmented system, it is difficult to locate authority and responsibility. What is missing is an institutional center that unites disparate interests and provides coherence to the education system. Indeed, as the cultural, social and political forces that shape education become increasingly fragmented, so does education governance.

Strong anti-institutional sentiments and the policies they generated from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s not only balkanized education governance but also added layers of bureaucratic

control. Legal scholar Robert Kagan argues that the preoccupation with rights and the search for total justice has created a highly adversarial system of governance in which conflict resolution has become an expensive undertaking. While the number of issues subject to formal review has expanded inexorably, administrative authority to resolve disputes has been severely attenuated.

For example, rules regarding working conditions for teachers used to be entirely within the domain of administrative prerogative. Now, they are subject to fairly rigid rules which are the product of elaborate negotiating processes. The number of teaching days, extra duty assignments, what constitutes the workday and professional development are specified to a degree that was unimaginable 40 years ago. The effect of this has been not only to increase the transaction costs of conflict resolution — the cost of disputes over special education placements, for instance — but also to render school decisionmaking a more unpredictable process.

Kagan argues that dispute resolution relies on the outcome of two-party adversarial processes, rather than administrative review processes which would allow for broader, more even-handed and consistent rule application. As a consequence, education governance has become an unstable, unpredictable undertaking.

Search for a New Order

The mid-1980s marked another major turning point in American education policy. The ideology underpinning this shift asserted that the U.S. education system was undermining the nation's international competitive capacity. The new ideology's manifesto was *A Nation at Risk*, which predicted in hyperbolic terms the demise of the United States as an international industrial leader if it did not improve its public education system.

The urgency for massive school reform intensified with talk about the "new" global economy, the increasing economic competitiveness of Asian countries and the emergence of a "new world order" based not on the "wealth of nations" but on the "work of nations," as noted by Robert Reich in 1991. As visionaries of the new world order saw it, newly developing global economies would reward highly educated countries and those individuals who add value to their country's goods and services. Conversely, those countries with poorly educated workers would suffer the most.

Policymakers in the United States embraced this argument. In 1991, national policymakers adopted national goals through America 2000. These goals were expanded through Goals 2000. Implicit in the goals statements are national standards for a wide range of academic subjects. More recently, President Clinton proposed voluntary national standards in reading and mathematics. Advocates of national standards argue that students in all schools, regardless of state or region, need to acquire similar knowledge and develop similar skills.

In the 1990s, education was called upon to do what it was supposed to have done for the Cold War in the 1950s and for the Great Society in the 1960s. The most recent call to arms is the assertion of America's economic edge in an ever more competitive global economy. Schools, as always, have been assigned major responsibility for creating the workforce for the new industrial world order. However, according to Public Agenda survey findings from 1991, 1994 and 1995,

there seems to be little faith among the public, and particularly among the nation's industrial leaders, that schools, as presently construed, are up to the challenge.

Dispersed control and accountability, bureaucratization, over-regulation and preemption of the common good by special interests generally are regarded as the most significant obstacles to an education system more attuned to current needs. Some critics argue education has become "too democratic," that groups have too much access to decisionmaking which has led to a proliferation of rules. According to this view, reform necessitates dismantling the current structure of public education and its monopolistic control by special interests, wrote John Chubb and Terry Moe in 1989 in *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*.

The context that shapes current education reform movements is part of a larger, global trend toward a diminished state role in public life. Liberalization, deregulation and privatization anchor the new global political agenda. Throughout Europe, for instance, liberal politicians are running on political platforms that would have seemed shockingly conservative 20 or 30 years ago. The rediscovery and growing popularity of private markets as more efficient alternatives to the heavy hand of government is not just an American phenomenon. Indeed, the British education system under Margaret Thatcher was reorganized completely; among its defining features are mechanisms to force competition among schools. In the United Kingdom, Germany, France and indeed throughout Europe, the role of the state is being redefined.

Changed expectations of schools and the context in which they operate grows out of an ideology that affirms the reemergence of private markets while it avers politics and an enlarged state role. Thus, the inchoate ideology that shapes education governance at the end of the 20th century is nearly the antithesis of that which formed the common school movement in the 19th century. The formative role of schools as shapers of an American identity and as the underpinnings of democratic values and the common good has been eclipsed by the aggregative role of schools that serve multiple, private interests. Education now is generally regarded as a consumer good, a commodity. One may search in vain for some statement in America 2000 regarding education as a socially transcendent value; all one finds are statements about free enterprise and economic competition.

The current context of education r ects a sensibility that celebrates diversity and seeks institutional structures to legitimate those differences. There is little room for discussion about common values, interests or purposes since those are regarded by many, particularly within the education community, as the vestigial vocabulary of oppression. While some states have had more success than others, one only has to track the progress of state efforts to develop curriculum frameworks, performance standards and assessments to realize how difficult it is to find common ground on even the most fundamental issues — what constitutes a mathematics, science or reading curriculum, for instance. State and local education policymakers are purging expressions such as "outcomes" or "outcomes-based education" or "whole language learning" from their vocabularies because of the intense and vitriolic reactions they create.

At the same time, bureaucracy and the state institutional apparatus that supports it generally are regarded as superfluous and even a hindrance to more efficient and responsive school systems.

The 1994 elections resulted in a number of states electing Republican majorities to state legislatures, in some cases for the first time since Reconstruction. A dominant policy theme reverberating around state capitols was the need to eliminate state bureaucracy, state regulation and mandates. In a number of states, there were efforts to downsize radically, and in some instances eliminate, the state education agency. The politics of the 1990s can be regarded in many respects as an attempt to undo the institutional structures created by the politics of the 1960s.

It is unsurprising then that a dominant theme in education policy today is that of privatization and the creation of market mechanisms to regulate education practice in lieu of state control and regulation. An emerging policy strategy for school reform is creation of quasi-markets as a means of stimulating change.

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) State Systemic Initiatives (SSI), for instance, generally eschewed established state agencies mostly because they were regarded as calcified regulatory bureaucracies more likely to obstruct rather than abet reform efforts. Charter schools, vouchers and privatized school management are education options that 20 years ago were only at the margins of policy.

This is not to suggest that there is a massive shift toward increased privatization. Charter schools, vouchers and privatized school management are still random specks in the fabric of school governance. While such reforms get considerable press, they tend to dominate policy talk more than policy action. Indeed, the dominant features of education governance are those shaped by the policies of the 1960s. But, the important point is the shift in ideology. While no massive migration toward privatization exists, there is a noticeable shift in public sensibility regarding the social purposes of education.

The idea of education as "moral development" has departed from most public discourse about education. The concept of education for civic virtue, the overriding concern of the common school movement in the 19th century, seems to many today a quaint echo from an irrelevant past. While individuals such as William Bennett advocate for schools to play a more formative role in shaping civic virtue, and others such as Robert Putnam and Frances Fukuyama argue that a robust civil society precedes a strong economy, these arguments remain at the margins of education policy discourse.

While the institutional role of the 19th century common school was to build a civil society based on principles of republicanism, the institutional role of today's schools is harder to grasp. Schools seem to be much more like a service, and education appears to be a consumer good that individuals may acquire in keeping with their tastes, needs and finances.

The dominant rhetoric of schooling today is about economic growth, productivity and efficiency. The need to maintain the nation's competitive edge in a global economy has been the driving force behind school reform efforts for the past decade and a half. The fact that a national summit on education was called and chaired by the chief executive officer of IBM and that one of the summit recommendations was to place education in the Department of Labor says a great deal about the role of education in contemporary society.

The press for decentralization today is quite different from decentralization in the last century. While the public's disdain for government remains, they are today less afraid of distant government — the immediacy of memory and experience of British colonial rule has been distanced by history. More important, though, is the differing political nature between the past and present versions of decentralization and local control.

In the last century, everything became an issue of politics. Dinner conversation and, for that matter, any social interaction were opportunities for political interaction. A vigorous and robust civil society provided the arena in which matters of common interest were debated. The glue that bound the architecture of political life, including governance of education, was the associational life of the community with its local civic organizations, clubs and churches. By contrast, the current move toward decentralization is based on the desire to create an education system based on private or quasi-private markets. As Chubb and Moe argue, it is an effort to replace politics with markets. As such, it is an effort to create an "anti-politics" of education where consumer choice rather than political interaction defines the education system.

The virtue of a market system for education is that it creates an array of choices for consumers. Ideally, parents would have a number of schools from which to choose to send their children. For example, charter schools offer parents the opportunity to tailor schools to their own preferences. While such a scheme of schooling may be intuitively appealing, it changes the dynamics of school governance rather dramatically by moving education into the realm of market transactions.

If this change accurately reflects the future of education governance, it redefines the social purpose of education. But perhaps more important, the privatization of education eliminates the need for civic engagement. While it may maximize the value of liberty, it undermines the value of community. The real questions for the future of education governance then are: What interests should education serve? What is "public" in public education other than its funding? If education does not serve a community of interests beyond the economic interests of the individual, is the common good defined as the aggregation of individual interests?

Role of the State and State Administrative Authority

Ironically, the devaluation of state agency authority is occurring when public expectations for greater accountability are increasing. Legal challenges to state school finance schemes, for instance, push states to assume a much greater share of education funding. This is all the more true as legal standards of equity are superseded by standards of adequacy. Also, states are developing curriculum frameworks, performance standards and assessments and are urged by national policymakers (President Clinton, for example) to adopt "standards-based accountability," a movement to hold schools accountable for student performance by means of incentives and sanctions.

While states have heightened the rhetoric of standards, assessments and accountability measures, they also have moved toward dismantling the administrative apparatus to implement such measures. In most states, financial support for state education departments has been reduced severely. It is not uncommon for federal dollars to represent the bulk of state education agency

funding. While state education policymaking has become more activist over the past decade, much of that activism has occurred in the executive and legislative branches of state government. In some states (e.g., Wisconsin and California), governors have aggressively and, in some instances, successfully wrested control of education policymaking from the state agency.

In 1994, the National Governors' Association (NGA) proposed overhauling "the way state education departments conduct their business both internally and externally." State agencies are hectored to "build their capacity and expand their expertise and resources." State education departments are criticized for being too hierarchical, bureaucratic and compliance-oriented. As such, the state administrative apparatus for education is viewed as a problematic organizational structure anchored in a model of rationality and ill-suited to current school reform trends.

The recent history of state agency leadership is idiosyncratic, dependent more on the attributes of individuals than of the office. Bill Honig's leadership as California's superintendent of public instruction has not been replicated by his successors, for example. Current reformers, like past reformers, urge greater leadership responsibilities on state agencies but suggest that the role of state education departments can be improved by reallocating resources, changing organizational design and cultivating new organizational behaviors. Such a view, however, confuses politics with organizational design. The problem of state agency leadership is not organizational, but political; leadership is not the product of organizational design but of political legitimacy and authority. Thus, it is difficult to characterize current conceptions of state agency reform efforts as more than organizational tinkering.

CONCLUSION

Whenever Americans are dissatisfied with their schools, they look to change the way they are governed. But, as noted earlier, the question of governance is not simply *who* controls schools, but also *what* is the ideological basis for that control.

Though the dominant ideological current seems to be headed toward greater decentralization and a diminished role for government, it is difficult to predict its precise meaning for school governance. There is considerable "policy talk" about various forms of choice, but the distinguishing features of school governance remain much the same. What is changing is that the issue of who controls education is being recast in different terms. Choice is a movement away from government and various institutionally mobilized interests and is being proffered as an antidote to a politics of education that serves narrow special interests. It is the "anti-politics" of markets.

Clearly, the question of governance cannot be separated from the transcendent questions of purpose. What society expects from its schools — what role it expects them to play in the shaping of the social, economic and political future of the country — defines the values and norms that shape education and determines who controls education and for what purposes. Do schools exist simply to teach children skills and do so in the most efficient, economical manner? Should education policy consist of an aggregation of private choices about education? Should the state and schools play a more formative role in defining the social purpose of education?

The issue comes down to an important distinction between private and collective choice. A movement toward an education governance system driven by market choices, even under the most ideal of circumstances, is based on the assumption that parents make choices that serve the best interests of their children. Collective choice and education for the common good, however, are absent from that calculus.

If education governance is treated simply as a technical problem of assigning responsibility and creating a system of accountability, it is readily solvable. On the other hand, if it is part of the larger fabric of social life, if it is an integral part of social policy that seeks to define who Americans are, then the issue of education governance is far more complex and needs to be examined within the institutional contexts that shape it.

Currently, there is no evidence of a national consensus regarding the institutional framework in which public schooling operates or the larger social and cultural purposes a system of public schools ought to serve. There is little discussion, let alone agreement, on the role of agencies of representative government — local boards and state education agencies, for instance. The current system of education governance is a patchwork-quilt whose patterns have been modified time and again. And, because the institutional crucible in which education governance is formed has changed, policymakers need first to ask the question, "What social role should education serve," and then ask, "What kind of governance system is consonant with that role?"

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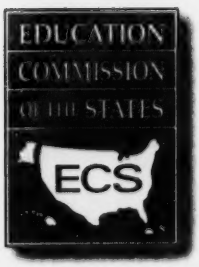

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